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LITERARY RESURRECTIONISTS.

A VENERABLE poet and philanthropist, taking alarm at the inconsiderate way in which the relics of the distinguished dead are put into market overt, is reported to have burned all his friends' letters, and to have requested his friends to burn his own. Observing the freedom, we may say license, in which modern editors indulge, he might well take such precaution.

If the world concedes to an author fame, notoriety, or the more substantial reward of lucre, it requires a good deal of him in return. It may secure him copyright, but by way of set-off, it asserts a kind of personal property in himself. It perpetuates his physiognomy, and it makes merchandise of his autograph. It puts upon historic record his most private peculiarities—his diet and dress, the incidents of his childhood, the errors of his manhood, and the frailties of his old age. It demands with an omnivorous appetite not only his own story to the minutest particular, but that also of his friends, and is content with nothing less than his diary and the whole mass of his most confidential correspondence. It would inspect his accounts with his publisher; it would know all about his quarrels with his editors,—what articles they graciously accepted, and what they positively declined to print. So soon as he has gone to his account, the doors of his study are thrown open, that anybody may inspect his unfinished wares, see the tools which he used, decipher his most careless memoranda, guess at his tricks of style and his manner of beginning and ending, know of his failures and the abominable devices to which he resorted, and, carefully collecting from floor and waste-basket, from desk and cabinet, his literary litter, proceed to print it for the delectation of the curious, the satisfaction of the censorious, and the amusement of the idle. He may be sincerely regretted, but there is substantial consolation in the money to be made out of his

demise. There is to be the great biography authorized by the family, and the little biographies unauthorized by critical decency. The monthly magazines are hungry for fragments. The small writers, who have no fame of their own, hurry to furnish us with their estimate of what he could do, of what he could not do, and of what he did. Mr. Thackeray is dissected by Mr. Trollope. Mr. Longfellow becomes the prey of various book-makers who were never heard of before and will never be heard of again. Mr. Carlyle, for all the ill-natured things which he said of others, undergoes a special retribution, and is written about in a vulgar way, which if he were living would drive him mad, or possibly betray him into manslaughter. With astounding obtuseness the family of Mr. Dickens print his letters, with the result of showing him to have been fretful, vain, selfish, and unjust. Mr. Hawthorne is the victim of several family factions, each of which prints against the other whatever it can snatch from his manuscripts. Mr. Emerson is so bewritten that one hardly dares to think of the confusion with which so much and such scribbling, in his life-time, would have overwhelmed him.

The father of the modern school of English biography was undoubtedly Boswell. Before the "Life of Dr. Johnson," many admirable autobiographies were written; but this was, if we may say so, the first autobiography written by another hand. There are occasional books, like "Spence's Anecdotes," which remind us of Boswell; there were a few collections of correspondence like that of Swift, Pope, Gay, and Bolingbroke,—letters which were not really letters, written, as they were, for anybody to read, and with a constant thought of future publication, but rather essays in an epistolary form, with a perpetual effort at wit, and, in spite of so many protestations of friendship, somewhat hard and formal. But it was Boswell who found out the expedient of taking the roof from off the house, exhibiting the hero in undress and at slippered ease,—of painting the portrait with absolute and dangerous fidelity. It is a curious evidence of the immense authority of Dr. Johnson while living, that the moment the breath was out of his ponderous body all the scribblers in London began to write about him, to collect anecdotes concerning him, and to give the world their idea of his genius. Fortunately for Dr. Johnson, he had loved writing too little and he had published too promptly to leave behind him any half-finished and unsatisfactory work. The curiosity, therefore, which

preys upon the remains of genius was obliged to satisfy itself with a minute narrative of the great man's manners or want of manners, with stories of his dictatorial style of putting people down, with samples of his sesquipedalian speech, and with many other characteristics which, in a smaller person, would have been thought of no importance. There was only one way of writing such a man's life, and Boswell hit upon it with singular felicity. Yet he stands almost alone. Many men have tried his method, and many have failed in doing so. Boswell's work is valuable, particularly because Johnson himself was mainly a man of society. The question still arises how far it is worth while to pry too closely into the private lives of those whose writings have arrested attention or won admiration. Of very few men of genius can it be said that a minute knowledge of their lives is necessary for a satisfactory elucidation of their works. Of the greatest of them, we know already that they were human. The world is no stranger to their weaknesses, their irritability, their jealousies, their indolence, or possibly their sensuality and selfishness. Enough of these things comes down to us by tradition. Moreover, something is due to writers in return for the services which often, amidst many difficulties and through much discouragement, they have rendered to their fellow-creatures. Dr. Johnson put the whole matter succinctly when, upon the death of Goldsmith, he said: "Let not his frailties be remembered — he was a very great man!" Men of genius are at least entitled to those ordinary civilities which enlightened communities recognize, and without which the lives of all of us would be intolerable. They are quite as much deserving of the amenities, living or dead, as the meanest of mankind. By what right, after they are gone and incapable of defending themselves, are they to be exhibited for the public amusement, and usually for a pecuniary consideration? Why should the estimation in which they are held be thus inevitably lessened? Often this would be judging them as they were judged in the days of their early struggle and poverty, when the book-seller sneered at them over the counter, gave them in the back shop the fragments of an earlier dinner, and paid them wages with which a hind or a hod man would have been dissatisfied. We claim something for the dignity of letters. We have no fear that anything important will be lost by a decent reticence, or by covering up the dead Cæsar and remembering only how he crossed the Rubicon.

We might illustrate what we have said by many modern instances. The death of so distinguished a man as Mr. Carlyle naturally arrested the world's attention, and provoked an appetite for biographical gossip. No writer since Johnson's day had been so marked by personal peculiarities, or was so inevitably doomed to the post-mortem processes. While his eccentricities of character had to a certain extent been betrayed by the manner and method of his works, it is a fact which it is quite necessary to remember that the sentiment entertained toward him was substantially one of affection. He had for a generation, both in England and America, been regarded by men, and especially by young men, as a guide, philosopher, and friend. There was a sufficient suggestion of cynicism in his works, but in his disciples it reappeared in a cynicism tempered by philanthropy, anxious for a reform in human affairs, and hopeful of the future. Something of this better purpose, it was thought, should be conceded to the master, however bitterly he might laugh at human follies, or however hopeless he might confess himself to be of a change in the world for the better. For the truth of our suggestion we have only to refer to the eager hospitality with which his earlier works were received in America. Some of our readers, if not many, will remember how reverently he was regarded by earnest scholars here; how we thought him the bringer of a new evangel fifty years ago. We still think that in all this admiration of Mr. Carlyle there was no radical mistake. We hold him to have been, in spite of all disclosures, substantially the man he was then considered to be — the man who wrote the sweet and beautiful essay upon Burns, the fine criticism of Voltaire, and the vigorous philosophy of the "Characteristics." His nature indeed became strangely distorted. He lost to a great extent the power of self-control. Constant ill-health made him irritable and ill-mannered, and increased his natural love of fault-finding. He discarded, if he ever possessed, the charity without which there can be no fair critic of men or events or books. Yet many of his admirers, mindful of early admiration, continued to follow him through the singular affectations of style into which he drifted, and to forgive everything to apparent sincerity, unexampled literary industry, and that love of truth which ran nearly to the extreme of believing all men to be liars. We were loyal to him in America so long as it was possible to be loyal; and when at last we were compelled to doubt, and ultimately to dis-

sent and protest, it was with a feeling of regret, and with the sense of having lost a friend. As Americans, we heard what he said of our sore trials with wonder. At first, we were hurt and incredulous; but then, with the independence which he himself had helped to teach us, we had recourse to our own self-respect, resolved that we would be what the hour demanded that we should be, and remembered that we could be made greater or less through no mortal's judgment. We began to consider Mr. Carlyle by his own canons. We thought him to be grievously mistaken in much, and we still retained a kind of respect for his mistakes. Upon the whole, in spite of all which Mr. Froude has done to lessen that respect, and of these disclosures which came upon us so suddenly and so painfully, we are still inclined to a considerate and favorable judgment. If we have been put into the position of a *valet-de-chambre*,— and it is Mr. Froude's fault if we have,— we are obliged to admit that we still find our hero in the snarling, ill-tempered, and, we are compelled to say, the supremely selfish man betrayed by this most treacherous of editors. We feel more than ever that we must make large allowances for human infirmities, nor permit them to make us ignore the painstaking scholar, the patient (or even impatient) investigator, and the critic of human affairs, who if so often wrong was also so often right. We feel that in the hands of this extraordinary executor he has not really had fair play— that advantage has been taken of his intellectual and physical infirmities. We are rather ashamed of the confidences to which we have been admitted. There is an under-bred air, as of the newspapers, about the whole business. We do not care to know about these housekeeping details, and are sorry to have had them thrust upon us. We say to ourselves, Who could bear the test? Who could come unharmed out of this ordeal of nakedness? Who would not loudly, and even *vi et armis*, protest against being subjected to it?

So much of this as may be attributed to Mr. Carlyle's own will and direction must go to the general estimate of his character which has been provoked. The autobiography is unquestionably his, and a melancholy piece of work, especially in his treatment of his contemporaries, we must consider it to be. And yet it gives us nothing new— nothing which we might not long ago have suspected. The admirers of Charles Lamb are, we think, justly, at least naturally, indignant at the contemptuous,

perhaps cruel, way in which Mr. Carlyle speaks of him; and yet that is just the way in which he would have spoken of him, if at all, in any essay or review, while living. Much the same is true of his gossip about Leigh Hunt. We are not surprised by any literary verdicts which we may find in these pages —nor, in fact, at anything of a general and public nature. What, we admit, does surprise and shock us is the light thrown upon Mr. Carlyle's domestic relations. Here he is altogether what we should not have supposed him to be. It might have been a great error of judgment, but we should have set him down as very different, as genial and unselfish in his own home, whatever he was in the world outside. He turns out, alas! to have been exactly the opposite—unreasonable to a degree; one with whom it were impossible to live in any comfort; mindful mainly of his own ease and convenience; shamefully disregardful of the feelings of a wife ready for any sacrifice; childishly ill-tempered about trifles; thinking only of himself. These are vices of character, vices alike in great men as in little ones, but especially vicious in one who was always rebuking the world for its selfishness and injustice, and perpetually finding fault with every form of self-indulgence. If we do not pardon readily such faults in little men, fatal as they are to social happiness, why should we pardon them in great ones? Are they venial in a writer of books living privately in Chelsea, but capital in a gin-sodden denizen of St. Giles, making his home a hell and his wife the most wretched of mortals? We are conscious of having used a strong and somewhat coarse illustration; if the reader is shocked at it, he is at liberty to modify it to suit his own peculiar taste; but after all, it is impossible to peruse these revelations of Mr. Carlyle's domestic life without a mixture of melancholy and indignation. An attempt has been made to extenuate Mr. Carlyle's irritability by pleading a like irritability on the part of his wife. Hardly beset we must admit this unfortunate woman to have been; but a careful perusal of the whole story, which Mr. Froude's want of literary delicacy has permitted, has satisfied us that Jane Carlyle, proud, jealous, and quick-tempered as she must have been, was a devoted wife, anxious for nothing so much as for the comfort of her husband, and always willing to spend and be spent, if so she might help him in his work. She was as great an invalid as he; she fell almost as easily as he did into fits of splenetic hypochondria; she had

a habit, as we gather from the letters, of daily dosing, little less than suicidal; yet weak, suffering, depressed, it was upon her shoulders that the weight of domestic drudgery rested, while her lord and master, usually impossible to please, and grim even in his rare expressions of approbation, snarled at trifles, sought peace in perpetual isolation, grumbled at his food, was constantly and childishly critical, ungentlemanly in his habits and manners, and about as easy to live with as a lunatic. There is nothing remarkable about this, except that these were remarkable people—the same thing frequently occurs in the most commonplace of homes. Those who love each other often do the worst they can to render each other miserable; but they do not put their miseries into books, nor parade them for the pity and amusement of mankind. Did no thought occur to Mr. Carlyle while annotating his wife's letters, of the old proverb which he was fond of using, about "washing dirty linen at home"? There is in the "Reminiscences" a somewhat sharp account of the squalor and shiftlessness of Leigh Hunt's domestic economy; but we venture to say that in the home of that clever man, often as it was in sore straits for the necessaries of life, there was a philosophical cheerfulness to which the other home in Chelsea to the secrets of which we have been admitted, was a stranger. It may have argued weakness in Mr. Hunt's nature that he was always sweet-tempered, cheerful, and hopeful; but if so, it was a weakness which the world has agreed to call by a much more respectable name; while the scornful passages in the same book, concerning Charles Lamb, tempt us to a similar comparison.

But it may be asked whether, after all, the world was not entitled to the use of these materials, in forming its estimate of Mr. Carlyle's character. We answer in the affirmative, if anything has been gained by them. Apart from that which we were not entitled to know, do they tell us anything which we did not know before? Do they help us in the study of Mr. Carlyle's books? On the contrary, we think that they have hurt much more than they have helped. As we now read the "Cromwell" or the "Frederick," we shall be in constant danger of underrating the philosophy, the good judgment, the real historic insight and honest purpose of the author. In the study of such researches the ordinary reader is compelled to rely upon the fairness of the historian, and to depend upon his view of the comparative importance of details. These books might have

been safely left to themselves. The character of Mr. Carlyle, developed by Mr. Froude, unjustly it may be, will taint their reputation, as the skepticism of Gibbon, perhaps with equal injustice, taints his immortal history. We shall suspect the absence of the judicial mind, and all the more because it will always be evident that the author has put much of his personality into his book; if we are compelled to doubt the health of his conscience, and to recognize his bitter prejudices, how shall we accept without scruple his biographical verdicts?

As a further, though minor illustration, we may refer to the injury which the publication of Mr. Dickens's letters has done to his literary reputation. The world was quite willing to accept him as an amiable man in private life,— as generous, chivalrous, and even tender-hearted. The world finds him to have been selfish, ill-tempered, a lover of his own ease and his own way, and very little regardful of the ease of others. There may be those who hereafter will read of Little Nell and of Paul Dombey with the old lachrymose effusion; but something of the criticism to which Sterne and the Dead Ass have been treated is inevitable,— something, we may add, of the doubt with which we peruse the tearful tragedies of Kotzebue. We shall remember the letters, and we shall have our suspicions. We ask ourselves if nothing is to be left to us of the old and enthusiastic admiration, —if we are no more thoroughly to enjoy a book, because we have been told too much of its author—too much of the domestic infelicities of Milton, of the coarse sensualities of Byron, of the canny worldliness of Walter Scott, of the inebriety of Burns, of Lamb, and of Campbell? Very few writers, and those only of a peculiarly felicitous constitution, can bear the ordeal. There is always danger that the man may kill the book.

But, apart from these considerations, there is a question of simple justice to the dead. Those who administer upon an author's literary effects exhibit a coarse nature, which proves their unfitness for the task, if, in their eagerness for profitable book-making, they surrender themselves to mere book-sellers' instincts and the monetary materialism of the shop. Does it never occur to them to ask how the man of genius, dead and gone, would, if living, regard this rummaging of his cabinet, this surrender to the world of his most private and sacred correspondence, this disregard of his own critical judgment? How, for instance, would Hawthorne, a man of the most exquisite

sensibility, and of so shrinking and retiring a nature that it really seems a wonder that he ever published at all,—how would he have relished all these liberties which have been taken with his name and fame? Not a book of his, it is safe to say, which has been published since his death, would have been printed by himself. Nine volumes, out of the twenty-four of the collected edition, have thus been given to the world. Some of the details of this unhallowed business may not be without moral value, and may serve as a warning to the professors of literature, that they set their desks in order and keep them so. For the benefit, likewise, of future bibliographers, we give a list of these posthumous publications:

"Septimius Felton," first published in a magazine, and afterward in a volume. Hawthorne had not finished it.

"Chapters from the Dolliver Romance," published in a magazine. Hawthorne wrote only one or two chapters.

"English Note Books," part of them printed in a magazine, and all in book form.

"American Note Books," in a volume.

"French and Italian Note Books," first printed in a London periodical, then in book form in the United States.

"Study of Hawthorne." It is to be noted that Mr. Hawthorne desired that no biography should be published. This is substantially "A Life."

"Glimpses into Hawthorne's Workshop." These are entirely private notes of Hawthorne on the form and character which the contemplated work should take.

"Dr. Grimshaw's Secret." Published in book form. Not a complete story, and bearing many marks of its incompleteness. The story, in fact, along with "Septimius Felton," "The Dolliver Romance," and "The Ancestral Footstep," starts from the "Legend of the Bloody Footstep" as its central point. Each of them proves Mr. Hawthorne's failure to write the story to his own satisfaction.

We leave it to those who have studied Mr. Hawthorne's genius with loving admiration to determine how much of this mass of miscellaneous matter he would himself have printed. We see little room for conjecture. Nor can we rid ourselves of the conviction that, if he could have foreseen this eagerness to put the very sweepings of his study into print, he would have taken effectual measures to prevent it. Did his representatives care nothing for what might have been his own wishes? His literary reputation may not have suffered — his was a genius too admirable for that; time, too, will set the matter right with the next generation; but what will the next generation say of

us who gratified our curiosity at his expense, who tempted his own children into this conspiracy against his fame, and whose love of literary amusement made this injustice to the dead possible?

He is not the only sufferer, nor do we see any limit to this exhibition of the dead for hire, unless there should be a great change in public morals and public taste. The time may come when there will be less reading for diversion, and a purer literary sense of what is due to the memory of the author — when it will be thought disreputable for compilers and book-sellers to improve the opportunity which death alone has afforded them of thus meddling with "remains." We trust, also, that the time will come when the public will be left to make up its own judgment of distinguished writers without any help from the manufacturers of small biographic essays which undertake to tell them what and how they should admire. We are rather weary of little books about great people. The world appreciated the merits of Carlyle and Macaulay, of Dickens and Thackeray, of Hawthorne and Longfellow, before these gentlemen of the quill volunteered to guide its taste and to give it their opinion; and it is greatly to be hoped that the fashion of writing about writers has been carried nearly to a point beyond which it will cease to exist.

CHARLES T. CONGDON.